

Unaffordable Ambitions: Syria's Military Build-Up and Economic Crisis

by [Patrick Clawson \(/experts/patrick-clawson\)](/experts/patrick-clawson)

Oct 1, 1989

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In the last decade, Syria has forcefully opposed U.S.-supported peace initiatives for Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria's inflexibility has persuaded many observers that little can be done to influence its president, Hafez al-Assad. In fact, much can be done once his vulnerabilities are understood.

In this Policy Paper, Patrick Clawson provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Syria's defense build-up and its economy. He demonstrates that Syria's military might—the foundation upon which its “spoiler” role is based—is overwhelmingly dependent upon foreign aid rather than domestic resources. Clawson suggests that by pressuring Syria's benefactors in the Soviet Union and Arab Gulf to reduce their aid, the United States can hinder Damascus' drives to achieve strategic parity with Israel, thereby significantly constraining Syria's ability to successfully obstruct a political settlement.

- 10 pages

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